**“The Centrality of the Word of God in Worship”**

Nehemiah 8:1-12

(notes based on the sermon by Dave Kolde, Hayden Bible Church, 4/25/21

 Today’s scripture gives us the rare opportunity to sit in on a worship service that happened 2,500 years ago. This worship service was to encourage the Judeans who had just returned from a 70-year exile in Babylon. Even though some people today equate worship with music, it also includes prayer, service, giving, and most importantly, the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God. This is the foundation for all other forms of worship.

 Nehemiah, the governor, and Ezra, the priest, and all the people together rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem in only 52 days. They came together, united in one intent to build. And then they came together, united in one intent to worship. Verse 2 tells us that there were men, women, and “whoever could understand.” That word “understand” is repeated 4 times in this passage, so it must be important. These people focused and listened attentively. They didn’t have their own Bibles, and the Torah had not been read to them in 70 years! Ezra and the priests on the platform read to them for 6 hours! 13 other men and more priests circulated among the crowd, giving them the sense of what was being read, helping to clarify, helping the people understand. I’m sure they even helped them see how they could apply these marvelous words. (Q1) The response? All the people shouted AMEN! They worshiped God in reverence. And then they started to weep. Why? Out of sheer joy at the mercy extended to them. They wept because they were repentant. They blamed their exile on their own sin and failures. They wept because they understood the Word of God: they knew they had sinned, and God in His mercy had forgiven them.

 Read verse 11 again. The day was holy because God’s Word had returned to His people and His people had returned to their God. At the beginning of the Reformation, Martin Luther translated the New Testament into German and the people heard it for the first time. Their reaction was the same: they were filled with joy at God’s mercy and they were moved to repentance. In 2021, we don’t need to change God’s message, because God hasn’t changed and people haven’t changed! We don’t need to replace God’s wisdom with man’s “wisdom”. How foolish that would be. Read 1 Cor. 1:18-21. (Q2)

 What then can we say about the Word of God? It is authoritative. Read Ps. 19:7-8; 2 Tim. 3:16; Gal. 1:11-12. The true Gospel is from God Himself. There are false gospels being preached today (Health and Wealth; Name it, Claim it; Critical Race Theory; Social Justice; etc.) Stay away from those! Paul couldn’t be more clear in his warning in Gal. 1:6-9. The Word of God should be read and understood and lived out. It should impact people’s lives. It should change us. It is the Word of God that brings salvation to His people (read Rom. 1:6 in The Message; Rom. 10:13-15, 17 (Q3); John 14:6). God’s Word is at the center of worship.

 In Neh. 8:1-12 we see Godly men willing to take a stand. That led to a revival of the Hebrew nation. We also live in turbulent times. Read 2 Tim. 4:3-4. We need Godly men to preach God’s grace and our desperate need for a Savior. Then Jesus will be a cornerstone to all who believe (see 1 Peter 2:6-10).

 What is the Word of God? Read Rev. 19:13. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God! The written Bible is God’s revelation to us. It needs to be read, stored in our hearts, and acted upon. We need to love it, live by it, and forever be thankful for it. Amen. (Q4) (Q5)

**QUESTIONS**:

1. How is a church service or a small group Bible Study like this event in Nehemiah?
2. What is the message we are to give the world?
3. What is your part in this sequence?
4. Share a scripture that you memorized as a child. Share a scripture that you will memorize this week.
5. “Understanding” was our key word today. How do people come to a **real** understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

**“Speak, O Lord” (Townend and Getty)**

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness

That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

Teach us Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of pow'r that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity

And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory